Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
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**FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 23rd April 2017, 6.30AM: Mahavir Harina Vanasthali National Park. Meeting point: Punjagutta (opp. Mangatrai Pearls), 6.00AM.**

Located on the Vijayawada highway, the Park was started as a sanctuary for the endangered Black Buck, but it now houses considerable numbers of Cheetal. Besides, the Park usually yields good numbers of small woodland birds, ground birds like Francolins and Thick-knees and, perhaps, even a Nightjar. Short-toed Snake Eagles are known to have nested in this park earlier. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

## BIRDING DIARIES
## Trip Report: Nehru Zoological Park, 21st May 2017

Anwesha Chaudhuri

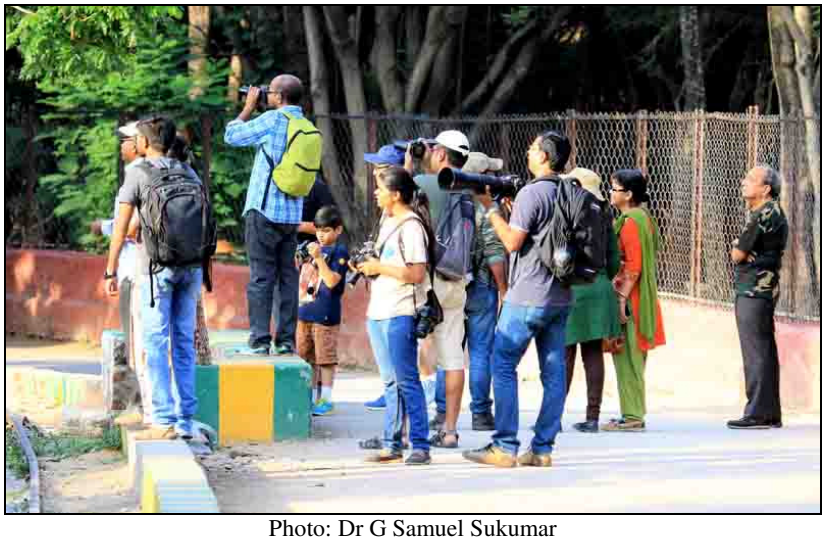


Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar

At the crack of dawn, my parents and I set off to Nehru Zoological Park. BSAP had provided us with a rare opportunity – a chance to experience the zoo in the wee hours of the morning, avoiding the Sunday crowds and the afternoon heat of Hyderabad.

It was indeed a special day, for we were going to encounter a familiar environment at a time when it remained untouched by human presence. Turns out the zoo transforms into a bird hub before the cacophony of people encroaches onto the peaceful haven!

**Oriental Magpie Robin**
(Photo: Anwesha Chaudhuri)

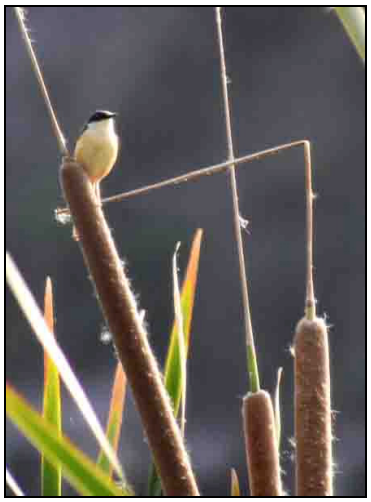
We were welcomed into the zoo by an Oriental Magpie Robin, singing into the morning. As we stepped into the eco-friendly battery-driven cars, our birding experts spotted a few other notable species like Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*) and Eurasian Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*).

**Yellow Bittern** (Photo: Yella Prakash Rao)

Our first stop at the zoo was at the lake where we were lucky enough to spot three different kinds of Bitterns – Yellow (*Ixobrychus sinensis*), Black (*Dupetor flavicollis*) and Cinnamon (*Ixobrychus cinnamomeus*).

**Grey Heron** (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

**Black-headed Ibis** (Photo: Anwesha Chaudhuri)



**Ashy Prinia** (Photo: Anwesha Chaudhuri)

Many of the regulars like the Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*), Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*), Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*), Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*), Purple Swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*), Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*), Purple Sunbird (*Cinnyris asiaticus*) and Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) graced us with their presence. The highlight of this stop was the Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyceros birostris*), jumping from one branch to another on a giant tree in search of fruits or prey.

**Cattle Egret** (Photo: Yella Prakash Rao)

**Indian Silverbill** (Photo: Anwesha Chaudhuri)

**Baya Weaver** (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

We noticed a flock of Baya Weavers (*Ploceus philippinus*) while walking down the road to the giant stork exhibit. A group of females were rating various nests built by different males so as to decide their choice of mate. It was a fascinating observation. There was fierce competition between males to not only craft the best possible version of their homes, but also protect their creations from rival males. The females didn't fail to intrigue: they inspected different nests in their formative stages to check for a good foundation. As nature has it, choosing a mate is a tedious process regardless of species.

**Rufous Treepie** (Photo: Anwesha Chaudhuri)

After spending a considerable amount of time observing weaver behaviour (I practically had to pull my father away from the spot so as to stay with our group), we decided to get back on the cars and move on to our next destination – the Bison arena. We followed a Rufous Treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*) for a few meters to find it casually hanging out on a branch, which made for an excellent photo-op.

**Common Hawk Cuckoo** (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

We also saw a Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*) flying around. My mother noticed a flock of Green Bee-eaters (*Merops orientalis*), her favourite bird, hopping from tree to tree.

**Indian Grey Mongoose** (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

The kids in the group (me included, in all honesty!) were extremely excited about a mongoose that seemed to be following us around for a while until he got the chance to cross the road and enter a tunnel that seemed to be his home. Our final sighting here was a flock of Yellow-billed Babblers (*Turdoides affinis*).

**Yellow-billed Babbler** (Photo: Yella Prakash Rao)

As we were on our way back, somebody spotted something interesting and, within minutes, the spot had aggregated most members from our group trying to get a good look at the bird. To my delight, it was a pair of Black-rumped Flamebacks (*Dinopium benghalense*) pecking away in all their glory. It was a beautiful sight indeed. I guess destiny saved the best for last.

**Black-rumped Flameback**
(Photo: Anwesha Chaudhuri)

All in all, our experience at the zoo was a memorable one. I had a few first-time sightings, and I was able to share the birding experience with my father. It was my father's first time out birding, and he was more than happy to reconnect with nature.

Before signing off, on behalf of everyone, I'd like to thank Ms. Shivani Dogra, the Curator, for giving us permission to visit the Zoo early in the morning, and for providing us with battery-operated vehicles, which saved us a lot of walking.

**Rose-ringed Parakeet**
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

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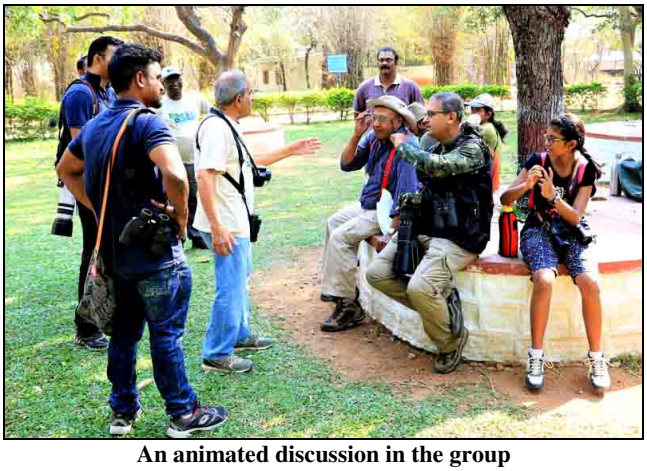
## Trip Report: Mrugavani Deer Park, Chilkur, 16th March 2017

Text: Shafaat Ulla; Photos: Dr G Samuel Sukumar



**An animated discussion in the group**

It was almost 6:30AM by the time 14 of us landed up at the park entrance. Permission to enter the Park early in the morning, and to go birding inside the conservation area, was very kindly granted by the Forest Department. A Forest Guard was also waiting for us at the ticket counter and welcomed us with a broad smile.

As soon as we entered the main gate, we saw a Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*) perched on the parapet wall and, as somebody remarked, it was a good omen for birding that day!

A few steps inside, a pair of Indian Robins (*Saxicoloides fulicatus*) were foraging on the ground and right above, on a flowering tree, a Purple-rumped Sunbird (*Leptocoma zeylonica*) was busy looking for nectar in the flowers. A Laughing Dove (*Stigmatopelia senegalensis*) was busy picking seeds from the lawns, while on an adjacent bush, a bunch of Yellow-billed Babblers (*Turdoides affinis*), were, well, just babbling noisily.

**Eurasian Thick-knee**

The Forest Guard unlocked the wicket gate and we entered the conservation area. The first bird we saw was a Stone Curlew, now called the Eurasian Thick-knee (*Burhinus oedicnemus*). Proceeding further along the jungle path, a flock of noisy Plum-headed Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*) flew by just as a White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*) caught our attention with his sharp and loud call.

**White-browed Bulbul**

We left the normal path and cut across to a small water body, almost dried up, where we encountered a Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) and a beautiful Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*). We now turned around to the regular track when someone noticed a bird way up on a massive bamboo shoot. After a few discussions and some photos, it was established that it was a Chestnut-tailed Starling (*Sturnia malabarica*).

**Chestnut-tailed Starling**

We had not quite finished admiring the Starling when one of us pointed excitedly to the left and we all had a good look at a Black-rumped Flameback (*Dinopium benghalense*), which was hacking away at the bark of a tall tree. We finally landed back at the main park, after having spotted a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*) on the way.

**Tickell's Blue Flycatcher**

**White-browed Wagtail**

As it was almost 9:00AM and we were getting hot under the collar, we decided to call it a day – but not before opening our breakfast hampers and settling down on the lush lawns to do full justice to the sandwiches, *idlis*, *parathas* and a host of other goodies.

Before signing off I would like to add that Sudipto brought along his lovely teenaged daughter, Suchana, who was enthusiastically observing birds and making notes. I wish other members who have young children would bring them along to our field trips and introduce them to bird watching and nature in general.

**Common Iora**

We chalked up a list of 40 species in a couple of hours, which was not too bad. A list of birds seen is given below:

| Sl. No. | Common Name | Scientific Name | Sl. No. | Common Name | Scientific Name |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Yellow-billed Babbler | *Turdoides affinis* | 21 | Greenish Warbler | *Phylloscopus inornatus* |
| 2 | Large-billed Crow | *Corvus macrorhynchos* | 22 | Red-wattled Lapwing | *Vanellus indicus* |
| 3 | Pale-billed Flowerpecker | Dicaeum erythrorynchos | 23 | Greater Coucal | *Centropus sinensis* |
| 4 | White-browed Bulbul | *Pycnonotus luteolus* | 24 | Black Drongo | *Dicrurus macrocercus* |
| 5 | Red-vented Bulbul | *Pycnonotus cafer* | 25 | Spotted Dove | *Streptopelia chinensis* |
| 6 | Plum-headed Parakeet | *Psittacula cyanocephala* | 26 | Black-rumped Flameback | *Dinopium benghlense* |
| 7 | Glossy Ibis | *Plegadis falcinellus* | 27 | White-browed Wagtail | *Motacilla maderaspatensis* |
| 8 | Eurasian Thick-knee | *Burhinus oedicnemus* | 28 | Asian Koel | *Eudynamys scolopacea* |
| 9 | Little Stint | *Calidris minuta* | 29 | Ashy Prinia | *Prinia socialis* |
| 10 | Chestnut-tailed Starling | *Sturnus malabaricus* | 30 | Grey-breasted Prinia | *Prinia hodgsonii* |
| 11 | Green Bee-eater | *Merops orientalis* | 31 | Pied Bushchat | *Saxicola caprata* |
| 12 | Common Hawk Cuckoo | *Hierococcyx varius* | 32 | Tickell's Blue Flycatcher | *Cyornis tickelliae* |
| 13 | Rufous Treepie | *Dendrocitta vagabunda* | 33 | Yellow Wagtail | *Motacilla flava* |
| 14 | Common Iora | *Aegithina tiphia* | 34 | Purple Sunbird | *Nectarinia asiatica* |
| 15 | White-throated Kingfisher | *Halcyon smyrnensis* | 35 | House Crow | *Corvus splendens* |
| 16 | Oriental Honey Buzzard | *Pernis ptilorhyncus* | 36 | Indian Robin | *Saxicoloides fulicata* |
| 17 | Common Tailorbird | *Orthotomus sutorius* | 37 | Oriental Magpie Robin | *Copsychus saularis* |
| 18 | Coppersmith Barbet | *Megalaima haemacephala* | 38 | Shikra | *Accipiter badius* |
| 19 | Indian Peafowl | *Pavo cristatus* | 39 | Laughing Dove | *Striptopelia senegalensis* |
| 20 | Purple-rumped Sunbird | *Nectarinia zeylonica* | 40 | Rock Pigeon | *Columba livia* |

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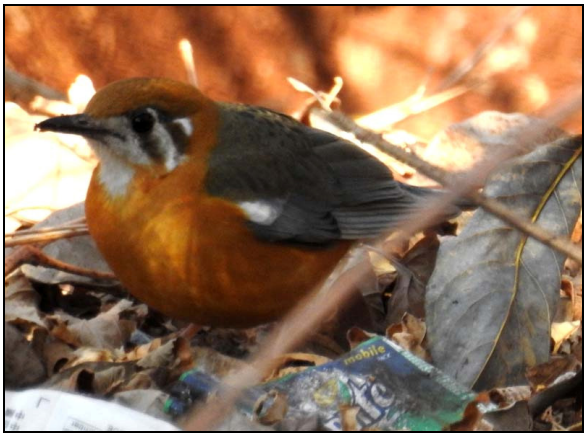
# THE BANYAN TREE
## Report: Ananthagiri Hills, May 2017

Text and Photos: Sita Susarla

**The Banyan Tree**

Standing majestically in front of the Anantha Padmanabhaswami temple in Ananthagiri (Vikarabad District) is a Banyan Tree. It is situated on the other side of the road and is easily distinguishable from the trees around because of its size. Though we had visited Ananthagiri many times, and parked our vehicle close to this tree, it had not attracted our attention earlier.

So what was different this time? Well, it was the chorus of bird calls. As we turned around we saw a lot of activity around this tree. For a second we did not know where to look. Within half an hour of observation we spotted nearly 25 bird species!



**Orange-headed Thrush**

There was an Orange-headed Thrush (*Geokichla citrina*) moving secretively and feeding on the berries. The Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*), on the other hand, was bolder and moved about the base of the Banyan tree along with the Olive-backed Pipit (*Anthus hodgsoni*).

**Black Redstart & Olive-backed Pipit**

Feeding on the fallen berries, also, were the Jungle Babblers (*Turdoides striata*), and a few feet from them was a lone Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*).

**Jungle Babbler**

**Grey Wagtail**

Sitting on the prop roots was a pair of Tickell's Blue Flycatchers (*Cyornis tickelliae*) and one Asian Paradise-flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*). A couple of Yellow-footed Green Pigeons (*Treron phoenicopterus*) were resting on the topmost branches, enjoying the warmth of the morning sun.

**Tickell's Blue Flycatcher**

However, the arrival of a flock of 3 to 6 White-bellied Drongos (*Dicrurus caerulescens*) and half a dozen Rose-ringed Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*) sent all the birds helter skelter. We noticed the presence of quite a few insects around the tree. The Drongos were feasting on them. Interestingly the Tickell's Blue Flycatcher was also seen feeding on the insects closer to the ground while the Drongos were at the top of the tree.

**Yellow-footed Green Pigeon**

The Oriental White-eyes (*Zosterops palpebrosus*), which are mainly arboreal, were also very active. February end, being the beginning of their breeding period, may have been the reason for this.

As we moved around the tree we saw a Greenish Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochiloides*), a few Common Tailorbirds (*Orthotomus sutorius*), White-browed Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus luteolus*) and Small Minivets (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*). A Large Cuckooshrike (*Coracina macei*) flew by. Never before did we see such a spectacular sight! The impact was so great that on our subsequent birding trips we kept looking at Banyan trees in the hope of spotting an equally large numbers of birds.

All this brought back memories of Chandamama and the pictures of Banyan trees full of birds pecking at the red berries, monkeys playing on its prop roots, and people resting under its shade. A perfect and blissful co-existence of flora and fauna! The Banyan, known as *Ficus benghalensis,* is native to India and is the National Tree of India. It is a perennial that spreads through prop roots and is considered to be the world's largest tree in terms of canopy coverage. The fruit are food to many birds and animals.

The full list of birds seen is given below:

| Sl. No. | Common Name | Scientific Name | Sl. No. | Common Name | Scientific Name |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Olive-backed Pipit | *Anthus hodgsoni* | 8 | White-bellied Drongo | *Dicrurus caerulescens* |
| 2 | Black Redstart | *Phoenicurus ochruros* | 9 | Yellow-footed Green Pigeon | *Treron phoenicoptera* |
| 3 | Orange-headed Thrush | *Geokichla citrina* | 10 | Large Cuckooshrike | *Coracina macei* |
| 4 | Plum headed parrot | *Psittacula cyanocephala* | 11 | Oriental White-eye | *Zosterops palpebrosus* |
| 5 | Rose-ringed Parakeet | *Psittacula krameri* | 12 | Common Iora | *Aegithina tiphia* |
| 6 | Jungle Babbler | *Turdoides striata* | 13 | Common Tailorbird | *Orthotomus sutorius* |
| 7 | Grey Wagtail | *Motacilla cinerea* | 14 | Small Minivet | *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus* |

| Sl. No. | Common Name | *Scientific Name* | Sl. No. | Common Name | Scientific Name |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15 | Greenish Warbler | *Phylloscopus trochiloides* | 24 | Asian Pied Starling | *Gracupica contra* |
| 16 | Purple Sunbird | *Cinnyris asiaticus* | 25 | Common Myna | *Acridotheres tristis* |
| 17 | Tickell's Blue Flycatcher | *Cyornis tickelliae* | 26 | Brahminy Starling | *Sturnia pagodarum* |
| 18 | Asian Paradise-flycatcher | *Terpsiphone paradisi* | 27 | Indian Grey Hornbill | *Ocyceros birostris* |
| 19 | Rufous Treepie | *Dendrocitta vagabunda* | 28 | Asian Koel | *Eudynamys scolopaceus* |
| 20 | White-browed bulbul | *Pycnonotus luteolus* | 29 | Southern Coucal | *Centropus sinensis* |
| 21 | Red-vented Bulbul | *Pycnonotus cafer* | 30 | White-throated Kingfisher | *Halcyon smyrnensis* |
| 22 | Black Drongo | *Dicrurus macrocercus* | 31 | Blue Rock Pigeon | *Columba livia* |
| 23 | Asian Brown flycatcher | *Muscicapa dauurica* | 32 | Common Crow | *Corvus splendens* |

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## Trip Report: Kasu Brahmananda Reddy Park, 23rd April 2017

Text: Shafaat Ulla; Photos: Dr G Samuel Sukumar

We decided to meet at the main gate of the park by 6:00AM. I was the first to arrive a little before six, followed by Santaram, the winter migrant from USA, along with his charming daughter-in-law. One by one our members started strolling in and by about 6:30AM, we were 19, and decided to enter the park, for which we had obtained prior permission.

We started by taking the main walking path to the left. After about 50m, we noticed a lot of activity on the right. The tree *Lannea Coromandalica* was full of fruits and hence was attracting a lot of birds like Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*), Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*), Small Minivet (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*), Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*), and others.

Regular walkers, when their curiosity got better of them, would stop and look where we were looking, and with a perplexed expression, continue walking, shaking their heads!

**Black Drongo**

**Green Bee-eater**

We proceeded further and entered the conservation zone, and the first bird we encountered was, as somebody mentioned, the 'loudmouth' – none other than the White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*). We continued walking leisurely though the forest, encountering Indian Silverbills (*Euodice malabarica*), Green Bee-eaters (*Merops orientalis*), a Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*) and a few more.

Finally we came to the lake and thankfully it still had some water. The bund of the lake was aflame with *Delonix Regia,* locally known as *Gulmohar*. About 30 to 40 of these trees have been planted all along the bund. Although good to look at when in bloom, it offers no benefit either to the birds or the bees or even the butterflies, having been imported from Madagascar. As a matter of fact there is no one to appreciate the flowers as walkers are not allowed to visit the area. This reminds me of the poem by Wordsworth:

"Many a flower blooms unseen, to waste its fragrance in the desert air".

It would have been better if local varieties of trees like Ficus, Silk Cotton, Flame of the Forest, etc. had been planted.

**Coppersmith Barbet**

The bund afforded a nice view of the water body. There were pairs of Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) and Indian Spot-billed Duck (*Anas Poecilorhyncha*), as well as an Intermediate Egret (*Mesophoyx intermedia*). We spent considerable time here as there was quite a bit of bird activity all around. The highlight here was the sighting of a male Greater Painted-snipe (*Rostratula benghalensis*), which is usually awfully difficult to spot.

**Greater Painted-snipe (male)**

I would like to mention here that Lt. Col. Vishwanathan and Lt. Col. Suri Babu had brought their young children Shruti and Shravya, and Gokul had come with his daughter Abhilasha. It was such a pleasure interacting with the young ladies that I really hope we see them regularly on our trips, and I hope other members also introduce their children to birding and nature.

**Asian Koel (female)**

**Indian Peafowl Male (L) & Female (R)**

Since it was now past 9:00AM, we headed back after notching up a list of 35 species, as per the list below:

| Sl. No. | Common Name | Scientific Name | Sl. No. | Common Name | Scientific Name |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Red-vented Bulbul | *Pycnonotus cafer* | 19 | Indian Pond Heron | *Ardeola grayii* |
| 2 | Purple Sunbird | *Nectarinia asiatica* | 20 | Intermediate Egret | *Mesophoyx intermedia* |
| 3 | Ashy Prinia | *Prinia socialis* | 21 | Little Egret | *Egretta garzetta* |
| 4 | White-browed Bulbul | *Pycnonotus luteolus* | 22 | Greater Painted-snipe | *Rostratula benghalensis* |
| 5 | Indian Golden Oriole | *Oriolus kundoo* | 23 | Indian Grey Hornbill | *Ocyceros birostris* |
| 6 | Green Bee-eater | *Merops orientalis* | 24 | Small Minivet | *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus* |
| 7 | Black Drongo | *Dicrurus macrocercus* | 25 | House Crow | *Corvus splendens* |
| 8 | Spotted Dove | *Streptopelia chinensis* | 26 | Laughing Dove | *Striptopelia senegalensis* |
| 9 | Indian Peafowl | *Pavo cristatus* | 27 | Tickell's Blue Flycatcher | *Cyornis tickelliae* |
| 10 | Indian Robin | *Saxicoloides fulicata* | 28 | Asian Palm Swift | *Cypsiurus balasiensis* |
| 11 | Yellow-billed Babbler | *Turdoides affinis* | 29 | House Swift | *Apus affinis* |
| 12 | Black Kite | *Milvus migrans* | 30 | Coppersmith Barbet | *Megalaima haemacephala* |
| 13 | Asian Koel | *Eudynamys scolopacea* | 31 | White-browed Wagtail | *Motacilla maderaspatensis* |
| 14 | Common Hawk Cuckoo | *Hierococcyx varius* | 32 | Rose-ringed Parakeet | *Psittacula krameri* |
| 15 | Grey-breasted Prinia | *Prinia hodgsonii* | 33 | Common Myna | *Acridotheres tristis* |
| 16 | Red-wattled Lapwing | *Vanellus indicus* | 34 | Indian Silverbill | *Lonchura malabarica* |
| 17 | Little Grebe | *Tachybaptus ruficollis* | 35 | Rock Pigeon | *Columba livia* |
| 18 | Spot-billed Duck | *Anas poecilorhyncha* | | | |

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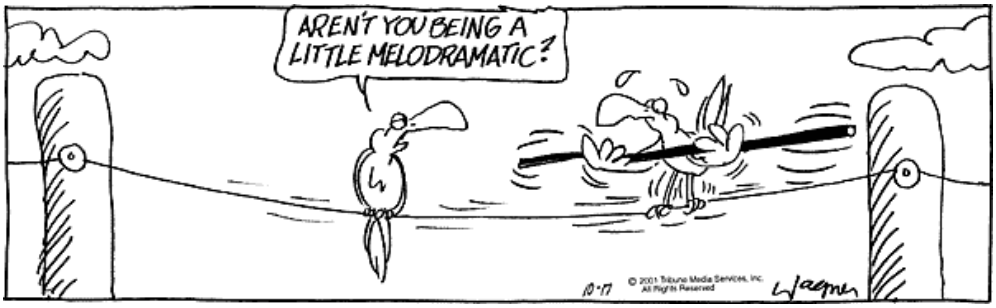
## Bird Humour

Contributed by: JVD Moorty

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## Bird of the Month

Text: Umesh Mani; Photos: Srikanth Bhamidipati

# Russet Sparrow (*Passer rutilans*)

**Russet Sparrow Male (L) and Female (R)** (Gushaini, Himachal Pradesh, 07-05-2017)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Passeridae
Genus: *Passer*
Species: *P. rutilans*
Size: 14-15cm

Description & distribution: A medium-sized member of its family, the Russet Sparrow is a seed-eating bird that is found commonly in the Himalayas, from Himachal Pradesh to Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Nepal, south-eastern Tibet and Bhutan, and across large parts of eastern Asia, including some parts of mainland Russia and northern China, and across southern China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Myanmar, Laos, northern Thailand and Vietnam. It is also known as the Cinnamon Sparrow or the Ruddy Sparrow

The Russet Sparrow is sexually dimorphic, with the general patterns being similar to those in the corresponding sex of the House Sparrow. The breeding male has bright russet or cinnamon brown upperparts, from the crown down to the rump, with some black streaking on the mantle. A thin white supercilium, running from the bill to the rear of the head, separates the russet crown from the black around the eye. It has an off-white neck and cheeks, a small black bib, and pale grey or yellowish underparts. The wings are light brown tinged with black, while the shoulders are chestnut. The tail is blackish-brown. The non-breeding male is not very different, being somewhat paler, and the upperparts being more orange than russet. The female has pale brown upperparts and pale grey underparts, and has a bold dark brown stripe through the eye, and a marked cream supercilium that goes from above the eye nearly all the way around the head. The wings are greyish brown, and the back is streaked with black and buff. Juvenile birds are similar to the female, though more pale and sandy in colour.

The bill is thick, suited for eating seeds of herbs and grains that form its main diet, and is black on the breeding male, horn-coloured on the non-breeding male, and yellowish with a dark tip on the female. The irises are chestnut, and the legs are pale pinkish-brown.

Thirteen subspecies have been described, but only three are widely recognised – the nominate subspecies, *Passer rutilans rutilans*, which breeds in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and south-eastern and central parts of China; *P. r. intensior*, which breeds in southwest China and parts of India, Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam; and *P. r. cinnamomeus*, which breeds in the range between northern Arunachal Pradesh west to parts of Afghanistan.

Habitat & behaviour: The Russet Sparrow is found to be quite widespread in different habitats and altitudes across its range. It seems to prefer areas close to terraced cultivation, but is quite common in gardens, open spaces, light woodland, agricultural areas, riverine grasslands and riparian forests. Breeding generally takes place at higher altitudes. In some behavioural aspects, it resembles its 'cousins', the House Sparrow and the Eurasian Tree Sparrow – e.g. it feeds on the ground. In non-breeding season, it is quite gregarious and forms big flocks, and also roosts in large communal roosts. Flocking Russet Sparrows feed close to the ground, and show 'roller feeding', where the forward movement of the flock is through birds at the rear of the flock moving to the front, turn by turn.

In the breeding season, though, it is not gregarious, and nests tend to be dispersed. Though the Russet Sparrow eats insects during breeding season, and berries when available, it is mainly a seed-eater, favouring seeds of herbs, weeds, rice, barley and other grains. Nestlings, however, are mainly fed insects like caterpillars and larval beetles.

The basic call of the Russet Sparrow is a soft, monosyllabic *cheep* or *chilp*, usually uttered in flight or during display, or a trilled *cheeeep*. The male may also string together some of these notes in a sequence, though the actual song is a thin *swee-swee*, similar to that of a robin, interspersed with some sibilant *chu-swik* notes, and is often described as the most melodious of any of the sparrows.

Nesting: The Himalayan subspecies of the Russet Sparrow, *P. r. cinnamomeus*, breeds between April and August. The male picks a nest site and, when a female ventures close, puts on a courtship display consisting of a raised head, drooping wings, a chest pushed forward and a lowered tail; this is followed by bowing up and down in front of the female. It nests in tree cavities, holes in stone walls, embankments and under thatched roofs, in electric junction boxes, as well as free-standing nests in bushes. It is also known to use disused nests of Black Kites, Red-rumped Swallows, woodpeckers and, occasionally, Spot-winged Tits.

The nest is usually a loose bunch of dry grass that fills the nest cavity, lined with feathers and fur. The usual clutch consists of 4-6slightly glossy elongated ovals with a fine texture, whitish with a grey tinge and brown spots, streaks or blotches; there are usually two clutches laid in a year.

Local name: The Russet Sparrow is known as *'lal gouriya'* in Hindi,*'chakli'* in Gujarati, *'angnadi kuruvi'* in Malayalam and *'adaikala kuruvi'* in Tamil.

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